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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000375

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: LEADING BOYCOTTER DISCUSSES PROSPECTS FOR PARTICIPATION IN 2006

REF: A. MANAMA 228

[1](#)B. MANAMA 174

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Aziz Abul, Director of International Relations for the Quartet Alliance of boycotting societies and organizer of the February 10 conference on constitutional reform, told us that the boycotting societies want to be a part of the democratic process but they do not believe that the current system is a real democracy. He warned that without a serious dialogue with the GOB, the Alliance will be more pro-active than ever in keeping people away from the polls. End Summary.

Independent Sunni chosen to represent the Alliance

[1](#)2. (SBU) Aziz Abul, who served as the head of the preparatory committee for the February 10 conference on constitutional reform (Ref A), told PolOff February 26 that the four political societies that hosted the conference chose him as their point of contact for foreign governments and international organizations. Abul is not affiliated with any of the political societies, known as the Quartet Alliance. While the vast majority of Alliance members are Shi'a, Abul is Sunni.

[1](#)3. (C) Abul noted that Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Fatima Al Belooshi had both publicly and privately forbidden the Alliance from raising the constitutional reform issue with foreign governments or foreign organizations. The press reported and Abul confirmed that the Baathist society in the Alliance, Al Tajomo' Al Qowmi, vowed to break apart from the Alliance if members appealed for help from the U.S. or UK. Abul made it clear that to avoid trouble with the GOB and Al Tajomo' Al Qowmi, he was representing himself and not the Alliance in his meeting with PolOff. However, he indicated that he was expressing the Alliance's views. He mentioned that the Alliance had unofficial communication with the International Crisis Group, the International Commission of Jurists, the Public International Law and Policy Group, and a French socialist organization. He added that a British lord offered to draft an analysis critical of the 2002 constitution.

Frustration with the King's refusal to negotiate

[1](#)4. (C) When asked if the Alliance was seeking a return to the 1973 constitution, amendments to the 2002 constitution, or a totally new constitution, Abul replied that all three options were viable. He said the Alliance's starting point in any future negotiations with the GOB would be the National Action Charter, which he stated was based on the 1973 constitution. Strategically, he said, the Alliance could not begin with the 2002 constitution as this would imply that the societies accept it.

[1](#)5. (C) Abul said he knew that the Alliance could not possibly get 100% of what it wanted, and noted that the boycotting societies would likely agree to participate in the elections if they see that the GOB has good intentions regarding constitutional reform. He emphasized that the Alliance respects the King and does not want to harm his image, but promised that if the King refused to engage the boycotting societies they will be more active than ever and "out in the streets" convincing people not to vote. He mentioned that Sheikh Issa Qassem and other influential religious leaders assured the Alliance that they would support a decision by the societies to boycott. He added that the Alliance would be active in getting Sunnis as well as Shi'as to refrain from voting.

Issues other than constitution

16. (C) Beyond the constitution, Abul said there were several other important issues that concerned the Alliance. The most important was the demarcation of district lines in Bahrain, which he claimed guaranteed Shi'a under-representation in parliament and violated the principle of one man, one vote. He noted that the size of the average Shi'a-dominated electoral district is significantly larger than the size of the average Sunni-dominated district. (Note: In a separate meeting, Al Wifaq board member Nizar Al Qari told PolOff that if the district lines were re-drawn in a fair way, at least half of Al Wifaq's members would participate in the 2006 elections even without a dialogue on the constitution. End Note.) In addition, he stressed the importance of changing the election law to give political societies more freedom. Alliance members also oppose the rule that required voters in 2002 to have their passports stamped to show they voted.

Praise for the constitutional process in Iraq

17. (C) Abul praised the USG's support for a fair constitutional process in Iraq. He said he knows the United States is worried about Shi'a majority rule and Islamists taking power in Bahrain, but emphasized that Bahrainis are ready for democracy and should be able to exercise their rights.

Comment

18. (C) Abul's comments confirm that Alliance members want to be a part of the democratic process. Since the breakdown of the constitutional dialogue in October 2004, the King has shown no interest in engaging in a debate about the constitution outside of established political institutions. There is still plenty of time to work out a face-saving solution, if the parties choose to go this route.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
MONROE